In the previous chapter, I outlined the structures of consciousness and their salient features. Of those, the mythical and the magical structures are relevant to this chapter. We have seen that the magical structure projects a world that is fused and intermingled. That is, the parts within such a world are connected and contaminated magically. Magical consciousness has no conception of physical distance, of present and past time, or of binaries. On the other hand, the mythical worldview is associated with polarities, symbols, and language. In the magical worldview, everything operates in a plastic medium in which all the participants are equal; the mythical worldview creates hierarchically superior gods in response to the increased dread of death. In the magical worldview, all the participants are the recipients and transmitters of the flow of magic; in the mythical worldview, power flows uni-directionally, from the gods to kings to people.

Another primary distinction between magical, mythical, and mental worldviews arises from their configuration of symbolic systems—the presence or absence of representative images, and (metaphysical and physical) connections between objects. It appears that in their earliest stages, representations and corresponding (real-world) objects were not very far apart in the imagination. In magical consciousness, the hunting ritual manifests the close relationship between the hunter's arrow and the sun's rays, and the "identity" or interchangeability between the prey and its image. With the gradual shift towards categories and
dualities, symbols and symbolic systems become increasingly set, until the entire sphere of social, cultural, and political existence can run solely on symbols, in complete absence of the signified. With mythical consciousness, symbolic systems such as language, money, and religion come into being. Where the two were once identical, the vehicle and tenor become gradually separated. In other words, the voodoo doll begins with being interchangeable with the person it represents, then assumes the form of a representative idol, and finally becomes so clearly recognizable in its own right that the person it was modeled after is no longer important.

These kinds of features inform the categories of magic and myth. Magic and myth subsume the magical and mythical worldview respectively, but accrue more significance as categories with social, cultural, and political significance. Just as the magical worldview projects fluid plasticity onto the world and its components, magic—in communities where it is active in the social and cultural imagination—is imagined to operate in an undefinable, underlying flux. More importantly, its function cannot be explained through rational terms like cause and effect. However, while magic is believed to be powerful, it is rarely ever—by itself—considered to be sacred. The notions of sacredness and profanity are brought about only with the mythical worldview. Myth manifests itself in the division of the world into polar opposites. It plays an important role in structuring the social and political systems of a society. It also establishes a more refined belief system. While magic may be conceived of as a flow, myth must be seen as an overarching structure.
Magic

Marcel Mauss states that magic "is an institution only in the most weak sense; it is a kind of totality of actions and beliefs, poorly defined, poorly organized even as far as those who practise it and believe in it are concerned" (13). The idea that magic is a weak institution is reflected in the difficulty that arises in trying to define how magic works because it is so different from mental-rational consciousness. In spite of the best intentions of those (anthropologists, ethnologists, historians, sociologists, cultural theorists, and litterateurs) who take up the task, an all-encompassing definition of magic seems elusive. As a discursive object, magic has accrued several layers of meaning and social significance. Furthermore, magic has never been understood in isolation in academic discourse; it is always considered in juxtaposition with science, religion, and technology. While most theorists of magic would agree that magic is found in practically every culture, its significance, status, and methodology usually vary from one community to the next. On the whole, though, communities with belief in magic display a view of nature, human society, and the connections between them, that is very different from those whose basis is rationality. The aspects of the world that rational consciousness deems ontologically disparate appear to have porous boundaries in the magical view. In effect, magic enables traffic between the animate and the inanimate, the dead and the living, the natural and the supernatural, and so on:

In its rites, rituals, taboos, and attendant beliefs, magic might be said to comprise, or at least describe, a system for comprehending the entire world. It provides a means for navigating among the varied forces that
comprise and shape material creation, and promises its practitioners methods of controlling or at least affecting those forces. In certain circumstances, magicians claim that their rites can elevate them to a higher state of consciousness, allowing them to... enter into communion with preternatural or supernatural entities. [Bailey 1-2]

The term “magic” spans several meanings including a (derogatory) denotation of everything that is foreign, and hence “evil,” “primitive,” and irrational. Magic has been associated with superstitious beliefs—a throwback to a pre-rational mode of existence. In modern times, magic is also entertainment, and is associated with the legerdemain of magicians and tricksters. It has been considered the inferior sister of religion (Marcel Mauss), a false science (Edward B. Tylor), and pseudo-art (James Frazer), but is now being used by neuroscientists to explore the idea that human brains are essentially islands of subjective realities (DiChristina). Magic has also been variously interpreted as a state of mind, a perspective of the world, a set of actions performed to achieve a particular effect, a source of power over others and over nature, a culturally and communally binding category, the root of technology, and the driving impulse behind modern-day nature cults. In academic discourse, magic has largely been weighed down by connotations of “illogic” and primitivism, and therefore considered a negative, if sometimes necessary, attribute of human

28 The term “primitive” is used by most ethnographers and mythologists to indicate a community or group that is not Westernized, and is non-rational and non-scientific. The term has connotations of backwardness, slower evolution, and ignorance. However, I use the term “primitive” to indicate communities that appear to be different from—not inferior to—Western society. That is, “primitive” here indicates a perspective rather than an evaluation of how undeveloped/underdeveloped a mindset is. Essentially, primitive communities are those groups that operate in non-Western paradigms. In such groups, the influence of magic and myth in day-to-day existence is readily noticeable.
development. However, there are also those like Morris Berman who view magical consciousness as the primary instance of egalitarianism, and its revival in various forms in the twenty-first century (especially by Kierkegaard) is seen as promising horizontality, equality, and compassion (Berman 200-12).

In the following section, I draw a brief historical sketch of magic, and examine it in specific social and cultural dimensions. Most of the observations made below are from anthropologists' point of view. While this implies that magic has been of active academic interest, it also means that magic, for the most part, has been studied from a mental-rational perspective. Be that as it may, my aim is to establish the rules that magic operates upon, its socio-cultural relevance, and its relation to science and religion.

A Brief History of Magic

The etymological root of "magic" is the Greek term "mageia" and the Roman term "magia," both used by classical writers to denote occult practices of the Persian Magi ("Magic" 570). That is, an alien culture's undecipherable activities were the first to be termed magical. For the Greco-Romans, everything "marvelous" or mysterious was magical. Sometimes, these mysterious events and activities were believed to be sinister, purely because they were inexplicable (570). Thus, from the time it could be considered a separate category, magic has carried connotations of evil.

Evidence of magic in Greco-Roman times has been found in such artifacts as amulets, curse tablets, gems with magical inscriptions, spells noted on papyrus, and other symbols and drawings. There is also written proof of magic by authors who
describe magical beliefs and practices in detail. Plutarch’s *On Superstition* and Book 30 of Pliny’s *Natural History* distinguish between good and bad magic and draw up legal conditions for the practice of magic. Apuleius and Proclus, who practiced magic, distinguished between lower and higher forms of magic. “Goêteia” is lower, “mageia” is general, and “theourgia” is higher magic (Betz 93). Although the Skeptics, Epicureans, and Cynics denied the validity of magic, several renowned philosophers of pre-Socratic times like Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Democritus discussed magic and magical rituals in detail (95). Plato even formulated legal punishment for those found harming others via magic (Plato’s *Laws*, Book XI).

From antiquity, magic has also been a literary motif, and even though an author may have had no recourse to magic personally, he would imitate the descriptions of magical acts found in his precursors’ writings (Betz 95). Homer’s *Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are important literary sources in which magic is a recurrent motif. Both texts contain several allusions to—and descriptions of—magic. For instance, magic is in play in Odysseus’s encounter with the witch Circe, his descent into Hades, the spellbinding magical songs of the Sirens, and in the oracular powers of the seer Tiresias. Oracles and diviners were believed to be magically endowed. Besides these, magic also plays an important role in Aeschylus’s *Persæ*, Euripides’s *Medea*, and Apuleius’s *Golden Ass*.

With the advent and increasingly dominant influence of Christianity in Europe, pagan gods, heathen rituals, and Satanic influences all came to be clubbed into one mysterious, magical tradition. The early Middle Ages show signs of magic intermingling with Christian teachings. For one, the clergy could not ignore the
presence of the Persian magi in the nativity lore, or the miracles and sacraments of Catholic rites. Therefore, in order to distance its own investment in magic from paganism, the Church split magic into the categories of "religious" and "heathen" magic. The former was celebrated, and its practitioners canonized; the latter was condemned, and its practitioners exorcised. However, magic and religion continued to be unified in popular imagination, until science finally demoted magic to the domain of ignorance and superstition.

Randall Styers highlights three major changes in Western society that significantly altered the meaning of magic and magical practices: the Reformation and Enlightenment that increasingly relegated religion and its associated magical practices to the private domain; the rise of capitalism and science, both of which promoted the view that the world could be mechanically and technologically manipulated; and the colonial conquest of Asia and Africa which created a new scholarly domain of "primitive" or ethnological studies (26). Alongside, there was also the rise of centralized controlling systems, of nation-state bureaucracies, and urban governance centers that aimed to suppress local power sources in the rural areas and the rebellious elements of folk culture. There were interesting economic reasons as well. The rise in literacy, banking, and insurance served to alleviate the burden of uncertainty in life, and thereby reduced the hold of magic as well (Middleton 88). Also, in a time of the Protestant emphasis on labor and the Catholic Church's close connection with new economic paradigms, witchcraft began to be considered illicit because witches putatively circumvented righteous labor and facilitated labor-free, illicit gains for their clients (Styers 33). This was in direct confrontation with the
increasing influence of capitalist economic systems in Europe. Additionally, witchcraft was believed to promote "unnatural" sexuality, promiscuity, and illegal medicinal practices. All in all,

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Europe experienced massive economic and political transformations. This era saw the fracturing of religious unity, the consolidation of the nation-state, and the emergence of new capitalist economic structures. During the same period, European powers launched an extended program of discovery and conquest of the non-European world that produced not only new riches but also a startling array of information from missionaries and explorers. Through this era, a distinctive form of "modernity" took hold within European culture. (4)

The consolidation of "modernity" was achieved through a discarding of all that was purportedly contrary to it. The modern (scientific or religious) self was made by highlighting its departure from the "nonmodern" entity, which believed in magic and magical practices (such as witchcraft), was non- or pre-rational, and which did not accept reason as the final truth of the world (25-26). Ultimately, this resulted in magic being attributed to every category less modern than the next. For instance, the Protestants accused the Catholics of being magical, and science deemed religion, as a whole, to be based on the same principles as magic. Ironically, this only led to magic being in constant circulation: the more modernity set itself up as new, the more it highlighted the old.
Even today, magic is often associated with the dark arts: with witchcraft, sorcery, black magic, and necromancy. These practices are seen as either evil or as products of primitive ignorance. The belief that magic was capable of enabling traffic between human agents and supernatural powers was regarded by many as the height of irrationality. Deep suspicion of witchcraft and of pagan rituals of herbalism, combined with science's limited insight into the reasons for psychosomatic disorders, led to vicious witch hunts, the epitome of which was the Spanish Inquisition. All over Europe, practitioners of magic were severely punished from 1450 to about 1750. Until 1736, there were legislations and rules in Europe making witchcraft, sorcery and enchantment punishable by death. The late Renaissance, however, revived the tradition of intellectual "high magic" with alchemy, astrology, Neoplatonic magical practices, and hermeticism. Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry initially developed from magical cults, but their magical elements were soon suppressed ("Magic" 571).

By and large, the rise of rationalism tipped the balance against magic: in the face of science, magic was reduced to childish play. Even when the existence of magic was acknowledged, there was still great skepticism about its use or efficacy.

Magic, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was relegated to those at the margins, and to what was considered primitive, or at least peripheral with respect to the centers of modernity and power. This belief is also part of the

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29 The eventual waning of witch hunts and an associated lack of interest in magic is attributed variously to increasingly stable social organizations, centralized power, more subtle means of psychological and religious control, greater social mobility, and the charm of technology and mechanics. A rising intellectual class also argued that the confessions of the so-called witches were wrongly extracted using violence, and that the Church was deliberately perpetuating the hoax of witchcraft (Styers 32-44). Those intellectuals who opposed witch hunts, however, were instrumental in creating newer modes of social, psychological and medical control over aberrant behavior, especially in women. That is, rationality was responsible for sharpening the distinction between "normal" and "abnormal" behavior.
colonial discourse, which relegated the "natives" to the nonmodern category. Imperialists and evangelical, proselytizing missionaries justified their actions by asserting that "a propensity to magic demonstrates an incapacity for responsible self-government; people prone to magic call out for enlightened control" (Styers 14).

Magic gained prominence in the twentieth century through the disciplines of anthropology and sociology as well. These disciplines attempted to document the uses of magic, its general rules of functioning, its association with religion and science, and its power in tribal and archaic communities. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the focus of cultural anthropology turned away from generalizations and towards the particular: magic, magical customs and beliefs were studied in "localized" cultural and historical settings. This, Michael Bailey points out, has led to a more nuanced "comparativism," whereby distinctions rather than similarities are highlighted (3). For the most part, these disciplines view magic as benign, but not on par with science and technology. The fact that disciplines like anthropology are "modern," implies that there will always be a complex relation between the object of study and the observer. Accordingly, the definition and reputation of magic fluctuate depending on the context of the observer.

**Magic in Academic Discourse**

Communities with belief in magic have always found magic powerful. In such contexts, magic is not a category separate from science, religion, or medicine. These distinctions appear only within modern and academic contexts in which magic is not only distinct from science and religion, but also inferior to them. For example, Tylor,
an "associationist," avers that magic is a principle of the "lowest known stages of civilization, and the lower races, who have not partaken largely of the education of the world" (Primitive Culture 112). Further, Tylor argues that magic is a systematic pseudo-science which creates connections in the world with clearly false propositions and erroneous results (Wax 495).

A generation later, James Frazer turned Tylor's concerns halfway around. Frazer emphasizes that magic had a great role to play in the creation of both religion and science. However, being a rationalist, he is unable to let go of the hierarchy inherent in the religion-science-magic nexus, and believes that magic is inferior to both, though it was also a necessary step in cultural evolution. Interestingly, as his reliance on the rationalist paradigm increases, Frazer is fascinated by the "folly" of magic as well as that of religion. Frazer's schema can be described thus:

... (1) that magic was everywhere the first stage of human mental (or spiritual) evolution, to be followed necessarily by religion and then by science; (2) that each stage was arrived at by leading intellects of the time apprehending that the "philosophy" of the preceding phase was intellectually ineffective; and (3) that each stage was clearly distinguishable, both historically as well as analytically, from the others. (Ackerman 129)

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This idea of evolution from magic to science is dismissed by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who does not accept that primitive "associationism" evolves into rational causality. Unlike a scientific worldview, a primitive, "pre-logical" worldview does not distinguish between natural and supernatural occurrences. Lévy-Bruhl considers primitive mentality to be completely different from modern modes of thought, and the presence of magic is a sign of this very difference (Tambiah 84-85).
Émile Durkheim's distinction between magic and religion has a different basis: the participatory value of each practice. According to him, religion is organized and "eminently collective," (46) but magic is restricted to magicians. Priests form a "moral" community, while all morality as well as a sense of community is missing among the magicians (Durkheim 43-45). Therefore, magic is underlying and profane, while religion is organized and legitimate.

On the other hand, Bronislaw Malinowski believes the distinction between magic and religion lies in their effects. Magic is manifested only in rituals which create an immediate effect and aid technology, whereas religion has other and more long-term goals. From his research in the Trobriand Islands of Melanesia, he finds that while religion addresses larger cosmic issues, magic is centered on more specific and everyday problems.

But that is a minor point in Malinowski’s exposition on magic. He takes a "functionalist" approach and views magic through its practical use (although he professes his debt to Frazer in the opening pages of *Myth in Primitive Psychology*). Malinowski’s argument is that primitive man is pragmatic and not reflective or meditative: that is, primitive man does not imagine; he acts. Moreover, magic is an extension to technology (Malinowski 79-86). The Trobriand islanders, for example, use magic to lessen the risk of a perilous task and to induce confidence where technique alone may result in failure. Malinowski’s important claim is that the

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31 There are strong counterclaims to this notion because many magic rites are carried out in an assembly, and many magicians are respected members of a society who happen to receive esoteric training. For example, Malinowski, A. Radcliffe Brown, and E. E. Evans-Pritchard’s research would suggest that magic is a very public activity.

32 Dorothy Hammond argues that in actual field work, none of these categorizations—religion, technology, magic—hold true (1350). These separations exist only in the mind of the observer.
islanders do not lack technical knowledge, and that magic is not a substitute for
depth: It simply functions as insurance against the risk of
failure. It follows that belief in magic is strong where control over the environment is
weak. That is, magic is found “wherever the elements of chance and accident, and the
emotional play between hope and fear have a wide and extensive range” (81).

Furthermore, for the Trobriand tribes, magic is not created by humans: “All
magic simply was from the beginning, as an essential adjunct to all those things and
processes which vitally interest man and yet elude his normal rational efforts” (83).
Like Mauss (discussed below), Malinowski also avers that magic is a force for
traditional integrity and can be effective only if it has been transmitted from
generation to generation without loss or change in its primeval form. As a
consequence, magic creates its own institutions, such as special pedigrees (shamans,
herbalists), and chants and rituals that are strictly prescribed and unchanging.

Providing a sociological perspective, A. Radcliffe Brown, who carried out his
research in the Andaman Islands, records that magic is a powerful force and is of
great communal importance for the islanders. Interestingly, for them, magic can be
acquired by anyone through direct communication with the spirits in dreams or in
waking life (177-78). Moreover, it is a power accessible to the brave: those who can
withstand the spirits in the outlying forests return to the village possessed with
magical powers as well as with spirit-tokens that attest to those powers (139). It can
be inferred from this that magic is seen in a favorable light. Once acquired, it gives
the magician great powers. Medicine-men, for instance, are magicians, and magic
grants them arcane knowledge of the healing properties of commonplace items (179-
On the other hand, they can also practice evil magic, and thereby cause illness and death (51).

E. E. Evans-Pritchard, who studied the Azande—a south Sudanese tribe—claims that magic cannot be understood as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of a "ritual complex" comprising rituals, chants, witchcraft, divination, and oracles (176). Among the Azande, magic does not have influence over nature. Rather, it is used to combat the mystical powers of enemies, and calamities that arise from these powers. The Azande distinguish between magic and sorcery. Although both involve spells, rituals, and chants, magic is a positive force while sorcery its malicious twin (176-77).

The study of magic in the twenty-first century has taken an interesting turn. First, the academic approach to magic has changed from the more universalizing approach of Durkheim, Tylor, and Frazer to one with a narrower focus. Instead of defining broad principles, magic, rituals, symbols, and superstitions are now studied within particular cultural contexts. Second, with the advent of postcolonialism and subaltern studies,

... magic has become an important category to understand and evaluate Western culture's interaction with and impact on the rest of the world. Historians and anthropologists have begun to untangle the ways in which Europe exported its particular conceptions of magic and witchcraft, as well as the effects this exportation has had. Colonial authorities used these conceptions to categorize and control native peoples, yet such concepts have remained dynamic or even taken on new dynamism in the postcolonial period as native populations now
seek to reassert traditional beliefs and practices, yet also necessarily strive to integrate these traditions with systems of Western modernity. Such efforts have reflected back on Europe itself, and scholars are beginning to reconsider more seriously how basic elements of modern European thought and belief have been historically and culturally constructed, and to what effect on Europe and the rest of the world.

(Bailey 14)

Such developments notwithstanding, in the following pages I revisit the founding principles of magic. The anthropological discourses of Frazer and Mauss lend vital insights into the psychological and sociological significances of magic.

_Frazer's Magic: The Child of Error, the Mother of Truth_

As has been mentioned above, magic was increasingly considered a negative cultural force from the seventeenth century onwards in Europe. Keeping that in mind, it is remarkable that Frazer contradicts the claim that magic has done more harm than good to society (46). In _The Golden Bough_, he makes a case for magic having mediated radical social movements. Although he is not known to have done actual field work, Frazer derives his examples from a number of places where "primitive" societies either once flourished or are still present. These include: Native American settlements; Asian countries like China, India and Indonesia; African tribes; the Inuit;
communities inhabiting the South Pacific Islands; and even ancient Greece, which, he finds, was steeped in the magical remnants of the preceding civilizations.33

Frazer approaches magic from a psychological perspective. He is more interested in the principles of thought that underlie magic than in magic’s manifestations in the form of rituals or actions. The two laws he stresses as the basis of magical operations are:

... first, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed. The former principle may be called the Law of Similarity, the latter the Law of Contact or Contagion. (11)

The magician’s belief that he can produce an effect by imitating it comprises the first law; his belief that his treatment of an object will manipulate the person the object once belonged to, arose from, was associated with, or was in contact with, forms the second law. Though most magical activities involve a mix of the two, for the sake of nomenclature, we may say that activities based on the first law come under Homeopathic or Imitative Magic. These activities operate through the “metaphoric” imagination since they are based on similarity. Those activities based on the second

33 The specific example is not as important to Frazer as showing how pervasive the principles of magic are all over the world. He emphasizes this point by also stating that religion varies from place to place, and from one age to the next, but magic remains the same everywhere, and in every age (56). His “universalism” principle also applies to myths. Laurence Coupe notes that “[Frazer] believes that we can make comparisons across cultures because the primitive human urge to myth-making is essentially the same” (23). While contemporary anthropologists would much rather study cultures in isolation, as particular cases, and avoid making cross-cultural connections for fear of overgeneralizing and glossing over particularities, the discipline of anthropology in its early years was very universalist or comparativist in its approach. Frazer, Tylor, Malinowski, Durkheim, Mauss, and Campbell, all analyze data collected from across the world to formulate principles and themes common to all.
law come under Contagious Magic and are based on contiguity (manifestations of
synechdochic-metonymic imagination). Together, these two laws form “Sympathetic
Magic” (12). Sympathetic Magic is so named because

... both [laws] assume that things act on each other at a distance
through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to
the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible
ether34... to explain how things can physically affect each other
through a space with appears to be empty. (12)

A common instance of Imitative/Homeopathic Magic is destroying, cutting, or
piercing an image (idol/doll/drawing) symbolic of a person and, by imitative law,
affecting the actual person. As is typical of a metaphoric connection, the
representative doll and person are not merely like each other (in the fashion of a
simile), but are so closely related that one can be influenced through the other.
Contagious magic can be seen operating among communities in which it is believed
that carrying the tooth, nail, hair or any other body part of a slain enemy will impart
to the wearer the strength of the dead person. Contagious magic also sets up a
connection, transcending time and space, between a wound and the one who inflicted
that wound. Subsequently, whatever is done to the instrument that caused the wound
(the weapon for instance), would affect the health of the injured.

Under the laws of magic, the cure for an illness can be performed on the body
of the magician himself. Physical distance is not a limiting factor in this kind of

34 Frazer’s “invisible ether” may be compared with magical “fluidity” as described by Gebser, and with
the idea of the Polynesian “mana” used by Mauss (discussed below). In all these cases, the implication
is that magic does not travel through pathways that can be logically defined.
healing (or harming). Nor is being alive or dead: some tribes use the bones of the dead to strike the living mute, deaf or blind since the dead cannot see, hear, or speak (30). Along the same lines, animals and human beings are also connected by sympathetic magic. Some animals are believed to possess characteristics which would be useful to man, so there are magical ways of transmitting those features from them to people. Inanimate things like sugar candy and gemstones can also pass on certain innate qualities to people. All in all, magic creates interconnections between the animal, vegetal, and human worlds; between the animate and inanimate; between the living and the dead; and across distance and time.

From his perspective, Frazer finds magic to be an innocent error on a gigantic scale, even if it is a necessary step in the cultural evolution of a community. However, magic is not inherently evil; rather, it is, for the most part, communal and beneficial. It is used to produce rain during a drought, stop rain when crops may be destroyed, cure illnesses, aid in child birth, prevent diseases, procure food (through hunting or farming), and so on (61). Public (professional) magicians are powerful members of the community, and work for the betterment of the people (83). Besides, magicians in some parts of the world also became the first kings, on account of their ability to control the forces of nature, to cause harm to the enemy, and to lead their warriors to victory using their special skills (90). On the other hand, Frazer also believes that magicians were inherently duplicitous insofar as they were subconsciously aware of the falsity of their claims and of the limits of their abilities. This awareness, and acting upon it, would ultimately lead to breaking the magical tradition, and ushering in more efficient ways to control the natural world (48).
The newer ways eventually lead cultures to religion, and then to science. Much of Frazer's argument rests on magic being a precursor to religion and science, but also inferior to both. Frazer calls magic a "mistake," because the laws it operates upon are quite elementary. Naturally, the savage mind can hardly be expected to be capable of abstract thought. The flaw of magic lies "not in its general assumption of a sequence of events determined by law, but in its total misconception of the nature of the particular laws which govern that sequence" (49). That is, cause and effect are recognized in primitive communities, but the reasons offered for this relation, through magic, are erroneous (29). Frazer clarifies further that it is not that laws of association are inherently incorrect; it is simply that when these laws are "legitimate" they apply to science and when "illegitimate," they apply to magic. In effect, it is the same impulse that drives both science and magic:

From the earliest times man has been engaged in a search for general rules whereby to turn the order of natural phenomena to his own advantage, and in the long search he has scraped together a great hoard of such maxims, some of them golden and some of them mere dross. The true or golden rules constitute the body of applied science which we call the arts; the false are magic. (50)

That is, it is an awareness of the underlying rules that distinguishes science from magic. Science is essentially knowing, whereas magic is mostly doing. Indeed, the magician of primitive societies is only well versed in "Practical Magic" (or pseudo-art); he never dwells upon the underlying mental processes or the abstract principles
of the practice. The laws of magic are subconsciously accepted rather than consciously cognized. That is, in magic, cause and effect happen "naturally" (18). For the most part, in magic, "logic is implicit, not explicit," although all magic—like science—has "logical consistency" (11, 22).

Both magic and science presuppose a system of uniformity and order in nature, and express faith in a set of "immutable laws" (49). An act will produce only a particular result each time it is performed. More importantly, the magician, like the scientist, is bound by the "rules of his art," also called the "laws of nature" as conceived by him (49). Consequently, the magician knows he does not have limitless powers and that he is constrained by the laws nature has already laid down. The implication here is that magic is a sham because a magician's actions are essentially shrewd wagers on things that would anyway occur naturally. Whenever nature fails to follow the predicted pattern, the magician's art is put into jeopardy.

Frazer's distinction between magic, science and religion is based on how each of these views the forces of nature. Magic seeks to control them, science to decode them, and religion to consecrate figures that control them. Even though magic has survived on its own, Frazer posits that at some point, the less orthodox members of a community would have realized that the "childish make-believe" world of magic (69) was not reliably efficacious. There would have been a growing realization that

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35 Theoretical magic, a tenuous category that barely exists, outlines the functions of a system of natural laws and the sequence of events and can, at best, be described as a "pseudo-science" (20).

36 Frazer emphasizes that although magic is a sham, it has existed and thrived through the centuries in almost all cultures. Since he is primarily interested in the psychology behind magic, he provides examples of magic in different cultures, but never mentions whether these were successful or how we may rate their success. He does point out that given the way magic was configured, failure was rarely ascribed at an individual level. After all, primitive societies were communal rather than individualistic. Moreover, with a long list of taboos and charms, and the belief that the enemy had equally powerful magic on their side, the failure of a magical rite could easily be rationalized.
the forces of nature were not under the control and command of humans, as the magicians had them believe. Due to the failure of magic to control death, injury, illness and natural calamities, a humbled humankind would have begun to supplicate the said forces rather than manipulate them (57). Thus, religion and gods are born.37

At the core of religion is the belief that divine beings with supernatural powers exist and these beings have the power to influence nature. This implies that nature itself is—to some extent—elastic and variable. On the other hand, as mentioned above, both magic and science believe in the immutability of nature, in a set of laws unchangeable by the benevolence or caprice of a higher being. For religion, the powers that govern the world are conscious; for magic and science, they are mechanical. A religious person believes in morality and in supplication to the powers that be; a magician claims to control the powers of nature himself.38 The magician operates on a “haughty self-sufficiency,” (52) which eventually develops into the submissiveness of the priest.

That the age of magic preceded the age of religion is clear to Frazer for several reasons. Magic is an application of the most elementary ideas of association and contagion, while religion’s belief system rests on the existence of supernatural beings beyond the visible veneer of nature. Since such a belief system requires a more complex imagination, religion must have succeeded magic. Besides, most primitive

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37 Karen Armstrong asserts that man is not just Homo sapiens but also Homo religious: the identification of oneself as human, mortal, and limited is contiguous with the acknowledgement of gods, the act of worship and supplication (Short History of God 3).

38 Moreover, a magician or shaman would also claim to have traveled to the world of the spirits and come back from that chaos without being overwhelmed by it. He can communicate with the dead, and with demons, without becoming their passive instrument (Oliva 176). In this sense, he controls supernatural powers.
cultures exhibit an absence of religion and a strong presence of magic; and for many, the two are barely distinct. For the same reason, "[w]hile religious systems differ not only in different countries, but in the same country in different ages, the system of sympathetic magic remains everywhere and at all times substantially alike in its principles and practice" (56). Moreover, while magic has only a substantial practical function, religion is theory and practice in equal parts.

In many primitive societies, the early stages of religion and magic blend in ritual composites. Action, or doing something, is magic (that part of a ceremony when water droplets are scattered over houses to invoke rain), while prayer (worshipping a deity, chanting) is the religious component of such rituals.

Finally, Frazer's most important claim is that magic was not a set of rules handed over to those practicing magic. Like science, it was, in its formative years, a matter of trial and error. Magic is flawed, its assumptions incorrect, its practitioners corrupt, and its believers naïve, but it is, first and foremost, a search for truth (62). The error of magic lies not in the hypotheses of magic, which seemed valid to the "savage" communities, but with those that refused to give them up after better formulations had been established in the pursuit for knowledge. However, magic is certainly a necessary step in intellectual and cultural evolution, as it precedes religion and science/rationality. Magic "has paved the way for science" and though "it is the

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39 In a clearly imperialist tone, Frazer avers that intellectual progress, made manifest in art and science, is tied to economic changes, and the latter is propelled by conquest. He claims that "the most vehement outbursts of activity of the human mind" have taken place after conquests, and "the great conquering races of the world have commonly done most to advance and spread civilisation, thus healing in peace the wounds they inflicted in war" (48).
child of error, it has yet been the mother of freedom and truth" (48). Overall, Frazer believes that the good in magic far outweighs the evil (46).

Mauss’s Magic: A Living Mass, Formless and Inorganic

Both Frazer and Mauss come to some common conclusions in their study of magic: magic precedes religion and is inferior to it; it is closely aligned with science, especially since it was incorporated into alchemy and medicine; and, it is expressed through action. Besides, Mauss also adopts a universalist approach to the study of magic (Mauss 19). However, the big difference in their approaches to the subject is the way they conceive of the core of magic’s function: while Frazer takes the psychological path to magic, Mauss approaches it through its social aspect. Like religion and science, magic is also a social category. It works within communities and elicits a certain kind of participation. Magic is not a fantasy created by the imagination; it is concretely manifested in “actual social conventions” (Mauss 46). However, it is also pre-logical, and incoherent.

We have reason to believe that magic does from [sic] a real whole. . . .

Very different processes can be associated together as complex types and ceremonies. Quite disparate notions fuse and harmonize without the whole losing anything of its incoherent and dislocated aspects. . . .

Magic is a living mass, formless and inorganic, and its vital parts have neither a fixed position nor a fixed function. (107-08)

Mauss finds that magic and religion employ the same methods and tools. He also contests Frazer’s assertion that magical rites have an “automatic, immediate
reaction" while religion works through more "respectful persuasion" (Mauss 26). Mauss observes that both religious and magical rites are performed with the desire for the same results, and both work in the same way. Thus, the distinction between them is not one of intent; neither is it of belief: like religion, science, morality, and law, "[m]agic, by definition, is believed" (113).

However, magic departs from religion in that it does not elicit the kind of social participation that religion does. Echoing Durkheim, Mauss asserts that unlike religion, magic is not an organized socio-cultural institution. While it is communally accepted, magic does not create a sense of community the way religion does. Furthermore, "[m]agical life is not compartmentalized like religion. It has not led to the growth of any autonomous institutions like sacrifice and priesthood" (109). For Mauss, religion creates distinctions like sacred and profane, and it plays out in the public arena. It also gives rise to a socially recognized priestly "class." Magic, on the other hand, is social but illicit. It is like a well-known secret, and it offers a foil to religion's more public presence. Besides, magicians are not a consolidated group, and a magical rite is a contract between an individual client or a small group and the magician. In spite of that, "... as far as magic is concerned, isolated individuals can affect social phenomena" (12). Interestingly, the magician is not very different from the priest, except that the priest enjoys a more socially acceptable status.

To the degree that magic is social, it follows that individual superstitions, subjective fears and beliefs are not part of magic (22). Magic is traditionally consolidated and a part of communal history; it must have a body of laws and precepts that are accepted by all, even if these laws and precepts are not practiced by all. Yet,
given magic's illicit and unorganized nature, magical rituals are not performed in
temples or shrines but in woods, secluded groves, and places that are far away from
dwellings. Such places imbue magical rituals with a degree of secrecy of action,
irrespective of the aim of the ritual. Unlike religious activities, a "magical rite is any
rite which does not play a part in organized cults—it is private, secret, mysterious, and
approaches the limit of a prohibited rite" (30). Besides, magical rites have the least
amount of sacredness, even when they are performed for benign purposes like
agricultural regeneration and medicinal treatments. Clearly, all such distinctions hold
true only for those communities that have consolidated a hierarchical distinction
between magic and religion, and associated the latter with sacredness and legitimacy.

Like Frazer, Mauss also suggests that magic is essentially "doing." Actions,
rites, rituals, and charms "are eminently effective; they are creative; they do things"
(23-24). But in Mauss's schema, magic has two additional components: the magician
(who accomplishes a magical action), and magical representations (ideas or beliefs
that correspond to magical actions) (23).

The magician is different from normal people, or he must at least be in a
different mental state during the ritual. A magician needs dexterity, skill, and
knowledge. He can typically exercise control over his soul and body, and has the
ability to defy the laws of physics. He can communicate—and facilitate
communication—with spirits, animals, and elements of nature. However, most
communities also have innate beliefs about who is more susceptible to possessing
and transmitting magical powers. As per Mauss's examples, people with perceived
physical or mental abnormalities, women (as a gender they are closer to the elements
of nature), and members of some professional classes like doctors, barbers, shepherds, and gravediggers are automatically considered to be magicians. This means that a magician is not selected randomly but through beliefs ingrained in the community's tradition (41).

Magical representations are vital to the processes of magic because magic cannot operate in abstraction. Magical representations are concrete "properties" or qualities, and Mauss argues that magical rites can be explained through these properties more easily than through abstract laws like Similarity and Contagion (92-93). A property, affixed to an entity, is understood in terms of its action and reaction on other elements through prior knowledge. For example, to correct an unusually quiet child is to magically transmit the talkativeness of a parrot to her. Magical reality not only presupposes the connection between talkativeness and the parrot, but also facilitates the transfer of the property (talkativeness) to one who does not possess it. Moreover, this association between an object and its effect is not a matter of trial and error. Rather, such associations and connections are strongly etched in the social imagination, even though the reason behind a particular association is of very little significance. The body of magical knowledge is traditionally established and cannot be altered or disregarded. Mauss suggests that the individual cannot oppose this tradition; he "finds himself confronted by rites and traditional ideas which he is never

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40 We may surmise that at some point, such associations must have been a matter of trial and error. Science also must have gone through a similar process of trial and error before being consolidated as an efficacious form of control. Only with repeated success would any representative unit have become fixed in its role. Mauss, however, is not interested in that incipient phase of formation that magic must have undergone. His analysis is only of magic as a socially acknowledged set of rites and representations.
tempted to refurbish because he has faith in tradition; without tradition there can be no beliefs nor rites” (86).

The flow of magic—from the magician to an amulet, or from a chant uttered in a ceremony to a patient who needs curing—occurs through “mana.” Mana (originally a Polynesian concept but appropriated by Mauss to explain the workings of magic) is energy that binds animate and inanimate objects, rites and participants, charms and recipients into one network of magic.

*Mana* is not simply a force, a being, it is also an action, a quality, a state. In other terms the word is a noun, an adjective and a verb. One says of an object that it is *mana*, in order to refer to this quality; ... On the whole, the word covers a host of ideas which we would designate by phrases such as a sorcerer’s power, the magical quality of an object, a magical object, to be magical, to possess magical powers, to be under a spell, to act magically. (133-34)

Because of the presence of mana, a magical transference between starkly different entities becomes possible. This recreates the fundamental feature of “confusion” between the actor, the rite, and the object. Magic relies on “a terrific confusion of images, without which, to our way of thinking, the rite itself would be inconceivable” (77). Once mana is accepted as the fluid energy coursing through the world, and creating its own pathways, even cause and effect become confused. In other words, there is no rational grid through which mana operates.

The third, and the most important, aspect of magic is magical actions: rites and rituals. As mentioned above, Mauss insists that magic exists in action and not in the
underlying psychology of the said action. Everything important about magic is either a part of, or is effected through rites, rituals, and ceremonies. Rites have verbal components (spells, chants, mantras, rhythmic drumming) and non-verbal components (symbolic actions, fumigatory baths, purification rituals, and activities like preparing a composition from several materials, drawing symbols, constructing idols or dolls). The function of the non-verbal component is to establish the conditions for the rite; the function of the verbal component is to evoke a particular spiritual or natural force, or to specialize a rite. A magical rite is believed to alter the participants as well as the representations.

Mauss emphasizes upon the social body of knowledge that rules that magical rites must be carried out exactly so, at the precise time, in a precise state of mind, and so on. It can be inferred that these rules solidified over time, and a rigid and fastidious observance of the rules was deemed essential to the efficacy of magical rites. Once a corpus of rules is fixed, the individual does not need to dwell upon the reason for a particular rule or revise a traditional practice. Additionally, a magical action is always subservient to this tradition. A magical experience is automatically re-formed to support the traditionally established truth. An individual’s subjective disappointment at a failed magical intervention is irrelevant and unrecognized. Mauss deprecatingly points out that the complex procedures of magical rituals—along with the elaborate pre-conditions stipulated for them—are designed to sustain the sham of magic. Whenever the desired result is not obtained, some cog in the wheel of magical rituals can be blamed: "it seems that magic tends to multiply the elements involved in ritual,
to such an extent that it seems to be providing itself with loop-holes, and often
successfully” (62).

Mauss uses the example of alchemy to display the association between science
and magic, but also claims that magic is what is wrong with alchemy. The scientific
component of alchemy, on the other hand, set the grounds for (genuine) chemistry.
The magical tradition and its rigid complex of magicians, spells, and symbols, is what
sets it apart from science. Science allows an individual the creative freedom to make
new combinations and try alternative methods to reach a goal. Interestingly, logic is
inherent to magic as well as science, but the only concession Mauss is willing to make
is to let magic be thought as a primitive science. On the other hand, he favorably
compares magicians to scientists because both engage in observation and speculation
on the “concrete properties of things” (94).

In conclusion, Mauss’s distinction between religion and magic is based on their
public presence and on the institutions they give rise to. Religion is collective and
takes place in the open; magic is underground, underhanded, and generally illicit.
Magic does not enjoy a status of legitimacy, though it is pervasive, popular, and
perhaps efficacious as well. Like religion, magic also has its own orthodox tradition of
ideas, associations and symbols. Like religion, it too is a social phenomenon.

Magic: In the Interstices of Religion and Science

From the above sections, it can be inferred that magic, in a triadic nexus with
science and religion, constructs the foundations of human society. Magic has been
conceived of as the point of origin of both science and religion, and yet it is also their
illegitimate and erroneous cousin. Magic is akin to science in its conception of the world as governed by immutable laws. The commonality between the magical and the scientific approaches is exemplified in fields like alchemy and astronomy. Besides, it can be said that magicians and scientists have been trying to arrive at the same goal through very different means, or that magical reasoning is a primitive form of scientific reasoning, or that magical laws are completely erroneous, and are more imaginative (and less empirical) than scientific laws.

It is equally difficult to cleave magic from religion because both essentially create connections between humans, nature, and supernatural powers. The contrast between the magician and priest is also very complex: it can be said that priests and magicians differ only in their social status, or that priests are the subservient version of the commanding magician, or that priests have understood the connection between nature and man better than magicians, or that priests enable good and magicians evil.

For Styers, defining magic is a problem not only because of the hazy distinctions between magic and religion, but also because magic itself was viewed very differently from time to time. He suggests that perhaps magical “art” was considered benign in most forms of folk magic (especially in medical recipes and in simple sorcery). It was probably even dismissed as a harmless pagan throwback in the popular imagination until it began to overlap with demonology. With the rise in religion’s preoccupation with satanic forces, magic began to acquire connotations of evil. In other words, the more systematic and organized religion becomes, the more
vilified magic is. This relationship is further complicated by the upheavals the institution of religion underwent.\textsuperscript{41}

Claude Lévi-Strauss claims that magic cannot be reified as an analytically separate category from religion or science. Religion, he says, is a "humanization of natural laws" and magic is the "naturalization of human actions" (The Savage Mind 221). Religion and magic are not mutually exclusive. If anything, they imply each other, and only their relative visibility varies from culture to culture. Dorothy Hammond also argues that to think of magic and religion as separate categories is facile. Instead, magic must be considered within the scope of religion, and magical activities as a part of one kind of religious ritual. Hammond also points out that anthropologists themselves are often quite confused about the semantics of religion and magic and their respective manifestations in different cultural groups. And yet, given their histories, the two are also different enough from each other. Hammond proposes a new analytical category of "magicoreligious," that combines the legitimacy of religion with the control of magic (1351). With such a composite belief system, it will become clear "that the gods do not rule alone; their will and power are accompanied by the will and power of men" (1355).

Magic is just as complexly associated with science and technology as it is with religion. The relation of magic to science, and magic's technical and psychological

\textsuperscript{41} Prior to the sixteenth century in Europe, "religion" referred to ritual obligations en masse. By the eighteenth century, the term's meaning shifted, this time to mean less of a ritualistic institution and more of an internal state of mind, a matter of private rather than public beliefs and activities. However, since no clear and universally applicable definition of religion has been arrived at, it becomes difficult for religion to demarcate itself from institutions such as magic. With the rise of technology and heightened rationalism in the late nineteenth century, both religion and magic were altered in their cultural significance. Both were largely relegated to the realm of the irrational and of superstition (Styers 6).
efficacy, have both been a subject of research. Magic is considered to be an archaic stage in the evolution of science in many studies, including Frazer's. According to such views, acts of magic follow a pattern similar to the steps in a scientific process. John Middleton points out that “[m]ost peoples in the world perform acts by which they intend to bring about certain events or conditions, whether in nature or among people, that they hold to be the consequences of these acts.” There is, therefore, a cause-effect relation between the magical act and its desired result, even if the details of the relation remain mysterious. Besides, just as science requires scientists, magic also requires specialists (82).

Malinowski’s approach unifies magic and technology. For instance, a farmer may sow, fertilize, and harvest yam—all of which are technical activities. However, it is magical rites and spells that ensure that the harvest is plentiful. The connection between the rites and the actual ripening of the yam is mystical and cannot—indeed, need not—be explained by a simple cause-effect relationship. In societies where magic and science are components of the same activity, people will find validity for both, and argue that both are equally important for favorable results. In fact, this dualism is justified by invoking tradition and claiming that the practice continues because this is exactly how the “ancients” grew yam.

**A Summary of Magic**

Magic has existed in cultures all over the world for centuries. From ordering a community’s worldview, to being a part of religion and science, and, in some communities, being completely sidelined, magic has had a long history. It is believed
to have been practiced for communal good, individual evil, medicine, and alchemy. But with the rise of religion and science, it has mostly been ascribed to the less evolved, less developed, more backward, and more ignorant of society's strata. Institutionalized religion gave an evil connotation to magic, as did colonialist and imperialist discourses. In the literary imagination, magical beings, whether good or evil, were either meant for children (in fairy tales), or for those seeking lurid pleasures (grotesque characters in gothic and horror tales). Today, magicians in many parts of the world are tricksters rather than healers, and provide amusement rather than remedies. On the other hand, in the fictional world of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, the non-magic folk are the lowly "Muggles." These are the various shades of reputation that magic has acquired.

Gustav Meyrink suggests that "magic is doing without knowing" (Gebser 60). That is, magic is primarily action. There is a firm, if unconscious, cause-effect, action-reaction principle in place in magical actions, and these relations are believed to have been always already present. That is, magic is imbued in nature, and its existence or function does not need to be explained or proved; it only needs to be believed. The practice of magic involves rituals, chants, and collaborative actions, but the most important facet of magic is the complex network of connections through which magical energy can flow and transform the participants in magic. This magical imagination subsists on synecdochic and metaphoric connections between entities in the world and outside of it.

This is one of magic's most pervasive features: it functions in—and creates—an elastic medium. Its flow forms connections across time, space, biological forms,
forces of nature, and inanimate objects. While magic is circumscribed by the magician and nature, the communal belief that through magic an entity miles away can be affected, the qualities of an animal can be transferred to humans, harvests can be assured, healing carried out, or damage and destruction can be brought upon one's enemies, is proof that magical energy can cut across ontological boundaries. Such connections seem erroneous to the rational mind as they are beyond the purview of scientific explanations.

Belief in magic is different from belief in science. For magic to be functional, belief in it must be communal and absolute. When employing magic, one cannot question how something happens. Science, on the other hand, welcomes doubt so that it may progress through the recognition of error. However, science also creates its grand truths, laws, principles and formulae that attain the status of axioms. Whether science is more efficacious than magic is arguable since efficacy is also a matter of belief.

The moral implications of magic are also an essential part of its power over the imagination. In some contexts, magic has been derided and associated with evil. This is especially true for those cultures which distinguish between established religion and its sacred practices and magic and its illicit gains. However, even within established religions, magic often surfaces in religious rites and in the form of miracles. On the other hand, there are cultures which view magic as benign and as an inseparable component of science and technology. Acts of healing and the manipulation of nature are directly connected to magic in such contexts.
In today's world, magic provides a perspective of the world very different from that of the rationalist imagination. Magical imagination is identified with egalitarianism, anti-rationalism, and literary modes such as magical realism and fantasy fiction. Postmodernists and postcolonialists turn the very "inferior" status of magic into a powerful and distinguishing quality of ex-centric and peripheral voices. Most importantly, magic eschews rational rules, and creates a space for fluid identities, fusion, and the collapse of binaries.

Myth

If magic is action, then myth is the story defining, explaining and contextualizing that action. With the move from the magical worldview to the mythical, we are broadly moving from practical existence to theorization, from doing to meaning, and from profane actions to sacred explanations. Since the mythical structure of consciousness (in Gebser's model) subsumes and transcends the magical worldview, it is not unusual to find at least a few myths that contain magic within their narratives (often in the form of metamorphosis). Such myths make magical actions "sacred" by investing them with a certain kind of institutionalized meaning. Magic is a flow of energy that transforms all the components it flows through, irrespective of ontology, physical distance, or time. The mythical worldview carries out a different kind of transformation: random occurrences are classified under certain "archetypes" and thus made meaningful. The possession of magic is a matter of power. Myths, on the other hand, offer models for emulation (among other things). Magic is concerned with action; myth applies itself to the reasons for that action.
Defining Myth

A myth can broadly be explained as a narrative or a retrospective rationalization for events or facts. The narrative almost always has a sacred or divine quality attached to it. The events are likely to have occurred in “anhistorical” time or “in illo tempore” and the dramatis personae in mythical stories are gods, tribal superheroes, or totemic ancestors. Often, the events neither occurred nor exist in the world of men, but humans are enjoined to imitate these via sacred rituals. Rituals, as prescribed by myths, convert a banal, everyday activity into a sacred performance. The actors of myths, in many cases, provide models for behavior. A king, a tribal leader, or a hero acquires divine powers by emulating rituals prescribed by myths or by adhering as closely as possible to mythic ideals.

Myths are mostly associated with either natural phenomena like birth, death, creation, maturation, the cycle of seasons, or with emotions such as fear, guilt, and desire. They may also address a social or universal lack, or give reasons for why a certain advantage is no longer available ("Mythology, Primitive" 1140). Some myths are also created to serve a socio-political function: they directly or indirectly govern (tribal) hierarchies, land possession, and caste systems. In other words, myths have a serious role to play in human society. Irrespective of their particular purpose, myths are universal occurrences, are found in practically all ancient civilizations, and continue in modified forms in modernity as well. Northrop Frye claims that much of

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47 Mircea Eliade uses both these terms to indicate the time before the advent of human history.
present day “non-mathematical” thought revolves around myths and the construction of myths (Frye 228).

Myth-making is “a primal and universal function of the human mind as it seeks a more-or-less unified vision of the cosmic order, the social order, and the meaning of the individual’s life” (Don Cupitt qtd. in Coupe 6). The individual invests his or her own life with meaning by connecting it to a larger social or cosmic story. In other words, myths provide order and meaning to life, action, and human existence. They are often orally transmitted from generation to generation and form a corpus called a mythology.

That myths consist of narratives points to their obvious artifice. As linguistic artifacts, they betray their status as human creations. Despite this, myths are sacred: they point back to a time in prehistory, and are considered to be bearers of truths par excellence (Eliade, "Cosmogonic Myth" 171). In fact, one could argue that myths are sacred because they purportedly unfold the truth, especially about existentially complex issues like life, death, power, nature, hierarchies, and so on. Myths exist because we are “meaning-seeking creatures” and therefore “mythmakers” (Armstrong, Short History of Myth 1-2). Both features make myths truly universal. Besides, the study of mythologies across cultures throws up certain overwhelming similarities in themes, narratives, and symbols. These similarities are known as archetypes. The existence of archetypes indicates that myths address issues that are innate to human nature, even if the overlying rituals, actors, and other paraphernalia

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43 Under non-mathematical thought, Frye enumerates modern political philosophies including democracy, communism, and fascism; Freudian psychoanalysis; anthropology; twentieth century literature; and the theory of symbolism (228-29).
vary across cultures. Myths thus supply meaning to the outer world while revealing the underlying patterns of the inner world of humans.

The mythic worldview creates distinctions between humans, animals, and gods, and also assigns a place to each in a hierarchy of sacredness. Thus, it generates meaning to alleviate human anxiety about the lack of order in nature. Events like sickness, death, natural calamities, and war, which are violent, vexing and painful, automatically engender myths that invest them with meaning. Similarly, the wish to escape history and profane time, and the need to remain hopeful in times of peril and scarcity, give rise to myths that make sacred, divine time available to humans.

Mythology, in Karen Armstrong's words, "is an art form that points beyond history to what is timeless in human existence, helping us to get beyond the chaotic flux of random events, and glimpse the core of reality" (6).

Myths are distinct from other kinds of tales and folklore in cultures where all these narrative categories are active. The distinction between them lies not in structure but in content and function. Percy Cohen suggests that the "sacred quality and the reference to origins and transformations distinguish myth from legend and other types of folk-tale" (337). That is, true stories or myths are the ones that tell the story of creation, of the primordial, pre-historic world, and of sacred actions carried out by supernatural beings. On the other hand, folktales are set in human time. Mythic narratives are not to be taken lightly or considered amusing; they are serious tales valued for their didactic content. While tales narrated for entertainment may feature fools, tricksters and anthropomorphized animals, and while legends may recount the
lives of human heroes who performed great deeds of bravery and nobility, myths typically feature gods, supernatural beings, or "anhistorical" heroes as protagonists.

Not only are myths universally occurring, the aspects they address are also universally relevant. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* outlines the main kinds of myths based on the aspects they articulate thus: cosmogonic myths that include myths of origin and primary creation; eschatological myths that include myths of apocalypse, destruction (and sometimes regeneration); anthropogonic myths that enumerate stories of how human societies came to be; myths of the creation of flora and fauna and eventual changes in them, as well as modifications in human conditions; divine myths that include stories of gods and deities; transformation myths wherein dramatic and irreversible changes take place such as the fall from paradise; celestial myths of the sun and moon; and the hero myth ("Myth" 1138). In his *Myth*, Lawrence Coupe enumerates five dominant archetypes or "paradigms" of myths—the fertility myth, the creation myth, the myth of deliverance, the hero myth, and the literary myth (1-5).

Not all the categories mentioned above are found everywhere. Some cultures have more myths and sub-myths of one kind than another, but it is rare that the other kinds are completely absent. Mircea Eliade suggests that myths within a culture can be distributed across a "scale of values" of importance. Some myths dominate and are original while others are secondary and parasitical. For instance, he posits that the cosmogonic myth is the dominant paradigm in all cultures ("Cosmogonic Myth" 173).

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*The term "archetype" is used most frequently to describe the underlying theme of several myths with similar functions. Eliade uses archetypes as synonymous with "exemplary models" and "paradigms." Here, exemplary means divine, non-human, or that which took place in mythical time and not in real time (Eternal Return xv).*
This myth traces the movement from primordial chaos to creation, and features the beginnings of life and stability. Frazer, on the other hand, favors the fertility myth. The fertility paradigm is strongly associated with agriculture and vegetation, and indicates that the pattern of human life is cyclical, in tandem with the seasons and the periodic regeneration of the earth. The hero paradigm, which plays a pivotal role in Joseph Campbell's work, showcases the extraordinary possibilities that are available for a human hero who is aided by divine powers. The Bible projects the myth of deliverance in which an apocalyptic end to present history is promised. Literary myths, especially those of Greek and Roman origin, bring gods down to the human world, and show that both gods and humans are susceptible to the same traps and vices. Armstrong argues that the most important myths arise not from a fascination with the creation of the world, but from the fear of death. Based on the findings of a Neanderthal grave, she proposes that it was the realization of mortality that propelled man to construct his mythic "counter-narrative" in order to infuse meaning and significance into the cruel fact of death. Since the fear of death is the prime cause of existential angst, Armstrong argues that the myth of death would have taken precedence over other myths for primitive man (Short History of Myth 3). Such a myth "humanizes" death (Kermode 7).

One should also keep in mind that a society's emphasis on a particular archetype is not permanent. Myths, mythologies, and rituals change with time and circumstance. For instance, the invention of agriculture after hunting would have caused several changes in the social imagination. This would have led to the creation of myths associated with fertility, the earth, and the forces of nature that helped or
hindered a good harvest. Moreover, because agriculture was not a simple activity but a constant battle against drought, floods, ravaging insects, and so on, the Earth Mother myths portray the fertility goddess (the Earth Mother) as ruthless, demanding, and vengeful rather than giving and generous. Armstrong states that since human activities dictate which myths gain preeminence, the myth of fertility would have been absent in the pre-agriculture era; it would have become active only once farming gained prominence in human societies (35-39). Eventually, when cities were created on river banks, flood myths would have come into existence, and with them, the rituals to appease the river gods. However, it is vital to keep in mind that the “creation” of the myth is never ascribed to a moment in human history, but is always deemed part of a body of knowledge that came into being before the advent of history.

Myth in Academic Discourse

Academic debates over myth began quite early in history. In the 3rd century BC, Euhemerus claimed that what myths presented as gods were actually only ancient human kings who had been deified through falsified or imagined memories. This implied that myths are erroneously recounted historical accounts. Among the Hellenists and the Stoics, myths began to be interpreted as allegories. These philosophers advocated that myths should be taken not literally but figuratively; myths have hidden meanings that must be gleaned. A similar line of thinking was also adopted by the Symbolists. For instance, when a myth states that man is fashioned from clay, clay is only a metaphor for the quality of being common. Obviously, each
community will have its own set of symbolic codes. Campbell—who places emphasis on the psychological insights that myths offer—insists that in order to understand the world and history, it is important to first understand the "grammar of the symbols" through the psychological category of dream symbolism (vii). Freudian psychoanalysis proposes that symbols which appear in dreams—and in all unconscious ideation—are also ubiquitous in folklore, legends, myths, proverbs, jokes, and idioms (19). Through the psychoanalytical approach, Campbell draws a link between the individual unconscious and myth. Similarly, Jung suggests that the "collective unconscious" is responsible for the "spontaneous production of myths, visions, religious ideas, and certain varieties of dream" (Storr 39). The collective unconscious is made up of archetypes, and one of the primary manifestations of archetypes is myth.

Opposed to the symbolists are the literalists: those that deem myth to be literal, and who argue that magic and other "irrational" elements distort accounts of mythic fact. Like the Euhemerists, they believe myths to be actual historical chronicles contaminated with magic. Of the literalists, one school is the nineteenth century intellectual mode of anthropological study "which treats myth as a form of explanation and, in particular, a form which occurs at a certain stage in the

Footnote 45: Jung defines archetypes as universally found "innate possibilities of images" (Jung qtd. in Adams 102) and "patterns of behavior" (Stevens 52) that exist in the collective unconscious. They are "purely formal, categorical, ideational potentialities that must be actualized experientially" (Adams 102). However, archetypes do not merely manifest themselves in conscious behavior; they control it. That is, whatever is consciously experienced, and then imaged in the mind, is unconsciously informed by archetypes. Thus, individual experience is reformulated and reimagined through the archetype. In this way, archetypes control and direct behavior. Archetypes are not communally, but universally, prevalent. They "give rise to similar thoughts, images, mythologems, feelings, and ideas in people, irrespective of their class, creed, race, geographical location, or historical epoch" (Stevens 48). That archetypes exist is supported by their presence in myths found across cultures (55).
development of human society and culture" (Cohen 338). This school of thought also attributes a scientific temper to primitive man. For these anthropologists, myths are essentially scientific or rational “explanations” of external phenomena, but unfortunately, these explanations are incorrect.

The functional and sociological approach of the modern ethnology camp, like Malinowski’s, involves studying myth not as a historical relic but in terms of its effects in contemporary society. In such communities where myths are an active component of everyday life, we may analyze how myths establish and govern all territorial, totemic and clannish rights in a community. Through such contexts, it is also easy to see how myths chart out beliefs, reinforce social structures, and establish moral rules. Myths are thus ideological in their function.

The English anthropological school, led by Frazer and Jane Harrison, pioneered the “ritualism” theory. The theory holds that the study of rituals is the key to understanding a culture; the mythic narrative is merely the accompanying and explanatory aspect and is of secondary importance (“Myth” 1133). This school proposes that ritual actions create the myth. Such a claim is premised on the assumption that (oral) narratives are more easily corruptible than ritualistic actions, and that myths remain alive only through ritual while the narrative dies out with time. Accordingly, it may be supposed that in most cases, “the myth was derived from the ritual, and not the ritual from the myth; for the ritual was fixed and the myth was variable, the ritual was obligatory and faith in the myth was at the discretion of the worshipper” (Robertson Smith qtd. in Ackerman 120).

Apart from being a ritualist, Frazer also puts his faith in “cognitionism,” the idea that myth is a kind of primitive science.
Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory is opposed to the symbolist approach. While symbolists are interested in only the expression of myths, structuralism explores the connections between the manifestations (or "content") and their underlying, steady patterns (or the "basic structure"). For example, Lévi-Strauss points out that the idea of adultery and revenge is a kind of "mythical cell" or basic structure, while permutations such as a husband killing his wife's lover, brothers killing their sister's lover, a husband killing his wife form the content (Myth and Meaning 39). It is this underlying structure that is universal and permits translations of myths across cultures. More importantly, he points out that mythology is "static"—that is, "we find the same mythical elements combined over and over again, but they are in a closed system" (40). By a "closed" system, Lévi-Strauss implies that the number of themes (or types of mythical cells) has already been enumerated. There are no additions or combinations to be made further.

Among these varied approaches to the constitution and function of myth, I have chosen two significant approaches to the study of myth: Bronislaw Malinowski's sociological insight into mythmaking; and Mircea Eliade's myth of eternal return, its relationship to the perception of history and the notion of the sacred.

Malinowski's Myth: Retrospective, Ever-present, Live Actuality

Malinowski carried out his anthropological research among the Trobriand Islanders in northwest Melanesia (in New Guinea). His first claim is that myth is not unchanging. Even as it dictates social and cultural factors, the latter reciprocally affect it. While the basic plot of the myth or its theme remains constant, there arise subplots
that change the form of the accompanying narrative. While on the one hand, myth's reality lies in its social function, on the other, "once we begin to study the social function of myth, and so to reconstruct its full meaning, we are gradually led to build up the full theory of native social organization" (Malinowski 44). Moreover, myth is a cultural force and there exists "an intimate connection" between "the word, the mythos, the sacred tales of a tribe on the one hand, and their ritual acts, their moral deeds, their social organization, and even their practical activities on the other" (11). That is, the mythic narrative or explanation cannot survive without the accompanying social conventions and rituals. Malinowski also argues that only in a society where myths are still alive and active in rituals and religion, can a justifiable study of myth be carried out. Myths in such societies are not part of a dead past but a "retrospective, ever-present, live actuality" (58). This also means that myths should be studied not in a literary but in a practical light. In a practical approach, it becomes important to keep in focus not only the narrative and its associated rituals, but also the emotions associated with the myth. These emotions are relived each time a mythic story is retold or a ceremony is conducted.

Malinowski is a staunch critic of such schools of myth studies as Nature-Mythology, whose proponents maintain that primitive man was deeply interested in natural phenomena in a contemplative and poetic capacity.⁷ According to Malinowski, primitive man had a very limited artistic or meditative interest in nature. The myths he constructed were not "idle rhapsody" or symbolic tales or poetic

⁷ Max Müller was one such scholar who believed that the "primitive myth-making man" was a "Wordsworthian nature mystic, struggling to embody in sounds and then in stories his intimations of immortality and eternity" (Ackerman 117).
imaginings but "a hard-working, extremely important cultural force" (13). The other popular approach Malinowski opposes is the one forwarded by folklorists and ethnographers such as Tylor, who insist that the "mythopoeic man was primarily a thinker, attempting to understand how the world came to be the way it is" (Ackerman 117). Besides, Tylor also suggests that myth is "sham history, the fictitious narrative of events that never happened" (Tylor, Anthropology, 387). That is, myths are products of primitive and erroneous ratiocination, and useful in modern times only as a source of insight into primitive (irrational) minds. Malinowski opposes both these approaches. He asserts that a myth is not a "mere chronicle" (14). It is not a sober, dispassionate account of history, closed and complete. Instead, because it is always fulfilling a sociological function, it is simultaneously being (re)created (58). Further:

Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is, in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction, such as we read to-day in a novel, but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies. . . As our sacred story lives in our ritual, in our morality, as it governs our faith and controls our conduct, even so does his myth for the savage. (18)

In other words, myths act just like religion; they are beyond the categories of real and unreal. They are not (faulty) scientific explanations of phenomena but narrative and ritual representations of an ahistorical, primeval reality. And because myths are essentially deemed true, they have the power to codify moral behavior and offer answers to puzzling questions of hierarchies. Myth "expresses, enhances, and codifies
belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is ... a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom” (19).

A community's narrative culture is not made up solely of myths; there were several kinds of narratives prevalent in the tribes Malinowski observed. There are (magical) fairytales and folktales recited for amusement, stories such as legends and hearsay that provide information about distant countries and other tribes, sagas about heroes, and sacred tales or myths. Among these, only myths are believed to be incontestably true. While the legend is remembered when faced with an unusual occurrence, myth becomes relevant every time a ceremony or a social or moral rule needs "justification, warrant of antiquity, reality, and sanctity" (28). This is why a myth is not merely a part of history; it comes from a time before it and shapes everything in its wake.

Malinowski claims that the role of the ritual cannot be overlooked in the perpetuation of the myth. Ritual is the "monument" in which the myth is embodied: seasonal festivals keep fertility myths alive, and birth ceremonies do the same for creation myths. Everyday activities for survival, gathering food, and ensuring the safety of the community also depend on mythic instructions.

The use of magic does not require a community to know what rules underlie magic's operation. Similarly, primitive man has no interest in explaining or making intelligible his myths. He simply follows prescribed rituals to keep intact a certain structure for himself and his tribe, and the myth reaffirms his place within the world. The myth of origin, for instance, evokes "the traditional feeling of a real and intimate
connection with the land; ... the historical continuity of privileges, occupations, the distinctive characters running back into the mythological first beginnings” (44). A myth like that promotes the idea of communal cohesion, and a feeling of kinship. Similar myths have been evoked throughout history for the task of nation-building.

Malinowski also addresses the question of why we need myth. Myths are explicit acts of faith “born from the innermost instinctive and emotional reaction to the most formidable and haunting idea” such as death (33). They help the community to translate an emotionally wrenching event or a ruthless act of nature into a regular event, unavoidable but certainly explicable. A myth offers reasons for such overwhelming occurrences, and sometimes plays up elements of (human) error and guilt in order to warn the listeners against repeating these errors. For instance, there is a Trobriand myth about how, once upon a time, a young girl was impertinent to her grandmother, and this resulted in the curse of old age and mortality. Elements of fate, destiny, and inevitability are brought down to “the dimension of human mistakes” (77). This makes a concept like death more comprehensible: death comes to us because we were cursed by an ancestor. Other myths provide sets of rules to avoid death, ensure safety, and increase fertility.

48 The failure of Orpheus to bring Eurydice from the land of the dead back to the living is another example of the same. The Greek myth is crafted as an answer to why the dead cannot come back from the Underworld. The idea that death is final rests on the mythic truth that Orpheus, once upon a time, failed to follow divine instructions, and thereby set the pattern for the unbridgeable separation between life and death.
Eliade's Myth: The Perennial Return to the Sacred

When magic was the governing paradigm of humankind's worldview, objects imbued with "mana" were considered potent and useful. In cultures with a mythic imagination, such magical objects were joined by mythical ones: those which were connected to myths and explained by mythic narratives as being sacred or evil. Myth offers the truth, and mythic narratives, mythic symbols, and mythical rites form a metaphysical system which discloses the "ultimate reality of things" (Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return* 3). Under this mythic system, objects and actions do not possess any intrinsic value; rather, they attain value or become "real" by participating in a reality (of their archetypal models) that transcends them. In using archetypes to impart value to objects, Eliade creates a "perennial philosophy:" everything that happens in this world has a divine counterpart in the other world (Armstrong, *Short History of Myth* 4). Thus, one stone out of many is deemed worthy of worship because it has a certain shape or quality that matches its Platonic ideal and is, by that token, a hierophany. Similarly, an act such as marriage or the coronation of a king assumes importance only when it is an exact repetition of its mythical, primordial, paradigmatic prototype.

In the particulars of his conscious behavior, the "primitive," the archaic man, acknowledges no act which has not been previously posited and lived by someone else, some other being who was not a man. What he does has been done before. His life is the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others. (Eliade, *Eternal Return* 5)
Additionally, an object or an action becomes “real” only if it imitates or repeats an archetype. If an exemplary model is missing, then the object is “meaningless,” i.e., it lacks reality” (34). All “meaningful” rituals and actions are believed to have been performed first by the gods, civilizing heroes, or mythical ancestors in *illo tempore*. Only such acts that repeat the original rite will be efficacious. An act such as marriage is sacred for archaic man because it imitates the union of the earth and sky, and repeats the act of god (an imitation dei). Given that all “meaningful acts” have divine prototypes, even conflicts and wars have their mythical precedents. Pain, suffering, and death are also not random; they have mythical resonances. Any such activity or event “always imitates an archetypal gesture or commemorates a mythical moment” (28) and humans only repeat, *ad infinitum*, the activities performed by gods.49

Such an argument has clear implications for the notions of time and history as well. Eliade, a proponent of the cyclical time frame, finds support for his argument in mythic rituals: archaic ontology rests on “the abolition of time through the imitation of archetypes and the repetition of paradigmatic gestures.” For instance, a sacrifice not only exactly imitates and reproduces the mythical prototype, but also takes place at the “same primordial mythical moment” (35). That is, it repeats the original and

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49 An apt example of the repetition of the activity of the gods by humans is seen in the Babylonian myth of creation from the *Enuma Elish*. A god named Marduk created the world by cleaving the goddess Tiamat’s body into two. Yet, by his own hands, the ordering of the world and his victory were not complete. The completion and re-establishment of order required that the liturgy be repeated year after year, and for this purpose, the ziggurat and temple in the city were built by the gods themselves. The myth suggests that these laws of creation must be followed by everyone; “even the gods must observe them to ensure the survival of creation” (Armstrong, *History of God* 15). Thus, not only men but also gods are dependent on mythic rituals in order to sustain creation. A similar example is also recorded by Jung. The Pueblo Indians of New Mexico worship the sun as their father, and also believe that it is their rituals that assist the sun in rising each day. Therefore, they are benefiting the whole world through their religious ceremonies. Jung comments that this is what defines the dignity and inner tranquility of the Indians and makes their life meaningful, even if the myth is a human creation. That is, while we may recognize that a myth is “not objectively true,” it is still sacred and essential because it can give “dignity, meaning, and purpose” to life (Storr 32-33).
coincides with it too; it exists simultaneously in time as well as in the “atemporal mythical instant.” Every repetition “tends to restore the initial instant, the plenitude of a present that contains no trace of history” (76). Profane time and history are abolished in such repetitions, but once the sacred act is over, profane time prevails again. Such a mentality implies that mythic time is always accessible to man, and that history is inconsequential because man can go back to the beginning. The point to keep in mind here is that man cannot possibly stay in the mythic moment, but must necessarily oscillate between anhistorical time and history.

The possibility of a return to mythic time has serious implications for communal and individual memory. Eliade argues that personal memory is important only for modern man for whom time moves linearly and is marked by events that take place one after another. As far as archaic memory is concerned, the loss of personal details is no loss at all (44). The fact that individual historical moments are not deemed significant has consequences for selfhood. The individual is not important, the collective is. For instance, a hero is usually a warrior who imitates, as closely as possible, a mythical hero. This warrior will remain in the collective memory of the community only if he can be identified with the mythical archetype. Even then, it is not the individual hero that is remembered but his memory assimilated into the myth of the archetypal hero. This transfiguration of historical events into mythic ones or the “mythicization’ of historical personages” (39) takes place when the hero’s “biography is reconstructed in accordance with the norms of myth” (40).

Eliade’s preferred archetypal myth is the cosmogonic myth which provides the anhistorical point of “beginning” from which subsequent creation myths about the
origin of plants, animals, and humans arise. Eliade reasons that "by the very fact that
the *creation of the world precedes everything else, the cosmogony enjoys a special
prestige* ("Cosmogonic Myth" 173, emphasis added). One aspect of the cosmogonic
myth is its corroboration of cyclical time through the repeated acts of creation. For
instance, rituals that mark the end of the old year and the beginning of the new year
coincide with the spring season, when vegetation is "renewed," and this guarantees
"the continuity of the life of the community in its entirety" (*Eternal Return*
51). This
periodic regeneration presupposes a new "Creation," that is to say, a repetition of the
cosmogonic act of creation out of primordial chaos. Such cyclical regeneration once
again serves to abolish profane history.

However, the eternal return to the primordial, auroral moment is not so much
a sign of escapism from history as it is a sign of primitive man's deep-seated desire to
infuse meaning into existence by always aspiring to be in that phase when gods were
still accessible. In other words, a periodic return to sacred time does not mean that
the fact of profane time's passing, and of irrevocable events occurring, escapes the
primitive mind.50 Indeed, an irreversible linear history is continually generated
through personal events, especially those events that produce sorrow or guilt.
However, it is myth that aids man in tolerating such a history.

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50 Thomas Altizer explains Eliade's formulation of the "dialectic of the sacred." According to this
dialectic, the notion of the sacred depends on the conception of the profane. Without the present state
of humankind's having fallen from grace, there would be no justification for Paradise to be the starting
point. The sacred, therefore, is apprehended by and grows out of a tension with the profane. For Eliade,
myth "is the language within which archaic humanity narrates its awareness of the discrepancy
between sacred time and profane time, and in which it projects their reconciliation" (Coupe 59).
Furthermore, the very fact that primitive societies feel the need for periodic regeneration indicates
that they understand the passing of profane time and the stillness of mythic time.
In such instances, the role of myth as a pacifying construction becomes clear. It can also be supposed that it is in this role that myth appears most to be an imaginary construction. Eliade agrees that "the myth is 'late'" but "only as a formulation;" that is, while its content refers to an "absolute reality" which is "extrahuman," its formulation in language is clearly a human creation (27). Even so, a myth is never thought of as a mere tale; its status as extrahuman is maintained by constantly infusing it with sacredness. Mythology actually constitutes the "sacred history" of a tribe. This sacred history justifies and explains the existence of man and his place in the world, and so it is considered a "true history" ("Cosmogonic Myth" 174).

With the power of communal unity waning, and the notion of individuality was gaining ground, it can be supposed that individual suffering began to be incorporated within a linear time scale. This paradigm was first promoted by Hebrew prophets. In Judaism, every calamity that befalls a people is inflicted by a wrathful Yahweh, and it is punishment for a transgression. Unlike the gods of the ancient societies who are divine archetypes and are imitable, Yahweh becomes a distinct personality who intervenes in mankind's history while being outside it. His "active" presence is marked at different points in history as a dialogue with his people, and each intervention is a new milestone. The time between two interventions becomes a fragment of history that cannot be subsumed within a repetitive mythology. Monotheistic religions like Judaism and Christianity were among the first to record history as a linear movement. So, for example, Moses received the Ten Commandments from God at a particular moment, Christ was born, died on the cross, and was resurrected at certain other points in history, and so on. Unlike the myth of
eternal recurrence, the myth of deliverance is an eschatological one, predicting the end of present history and the beginning of a new order after a violent, apocalyptic break.

In the latter, linear time scheme, man's place in the world heaves onto him a historical destiny which is tolerated with varying degrees of fatalism. While individuals can escape from it through philosophy or mysticism, history in itself becomes "tragic, pathetic, unjust, chaotic, as any moment that heralds the final catastrophe must be" (131). The final catastrophe, however, fills the believer with optimism because it means that the age of gold is at hand. And then, either the cycle will begin afresh or history will be abolished forever.

The Significance of Myth

Myths are not found only in anthropological or ethnographic studies; they are alive in religion and literature as well. Ernst Cassirer suggests that they form a kind of cultural category, alongside physics, math, philosophy, language, art, and literature (Frye 229). Some of these categories are logical, some pre-logical, and some—like myth—are extra-logical. That is, one need not weigh myth in the balance of logic, or even truth. Myth lies beyond such parameters, just as the worlds described in myths lie beyond history. In societies with a mythical worldview, myths direct social structures, economic activities, and political decrees. In religion, myths subsume within them divine archetypes, and the associated rituals articulate the correct forms

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91 The new order, acquired through the passage of history, is not a simple return to the origins: it is "the beginning transformed, on a higher level; it takes on a whole new significance because it is informed by the long struggle through the wilderness of sin and death" (Coupe 77).
of conduct between gods and men. Myths have the ability to create a connection between the earthly and the heavenly even as they maintain a necessary hierarchy between the two. Myths can even suspend profane history.

Literary myths provide adventures that tie heaven and earth together, and stage heroes and villains that embody the essential virtues and flaws pervasive in all humankind. Hazel Barnes points out that myths are popularly used as literary motifs because they are pools of shared information: they establish an instant connection between the archetypal story and the adaptation, even when the adaptation is widely divergent from the archetype. It is in the very essence of myth to trace its every adaptation or manifestation to the original plot, character, or theme. Since myths are "suggestive of meaning on several levels" all at once (123), a whole body of historical and literary references is carried forward in the recurrence of a mythic narrative or character. This is what Frank Kermode means when he says that the mythic imagination works on shared information codes (105). Besides, myths also seek to provide answers that are difficult to come by through pure logic, especially to questions concerning existential dilemmas.

As touched upon in the preceding sections, the value of mythology as historical documentation is quite complex. There are "positivist" historiographers who declare that "myth has nothing to do with history," and "academic" mythologists who aver that "history has nothing to do with myth." While certain contemporary historians study myth as an object or category of historiography, others view history as a sort of myth (Heehs 5). Some "modern" historians try to erase all traces of myth from historical documentation while many ethnographers strongly feel that the historical
past has less explanatory power than the mythic past. Postmodernist historiographers would assert that what they create is, at best, a "mythistory," a common body of fact and fiction in which lines between the two are blurred or missing.

Mythopoeia or myth-making is also an essential part of the world of myths, and an exercise in a vast codification of symbols. As mentioned earlier, myth and magic vary in the way they employ the system of symbols. Where magic's traffic in symbols is minimal, myth almost wholly subsists on symbolic systems. The development of myth is coterminous with the development of language, and hence, myths are often associated with oral literary traditions. It can be concluded that while rituals are followed rigidly, mythic narratives are numerous and varied because they are adjusted to suit new contexts.

In a magical world, elements have fluid boundaries, and no clear distinction can be made on the basis of any dichotomy. With myths, we find binaries becoming increasingly apparent in the universe. Within a mythical paradigm, everything that can recapitulate an established archetype is part of a sacred ritual. A myth creates structures, while magic is like a transformative flow of energy between these structures. Magic addresses action or how to create an effect; myth attempts to explain why one must perform a particular action in order to create that effect.

For instance, Campbell cites the mythical ritual of the Pawnees of northern Kansas and southern Nebraska, in which the priest draws a circle with his toe during a ceremony and says that the circle represents a nest. He has built it with his toe because an eagle builds its nest with claws. The symbolic reference is three-fold: the eagle's talon is referred to by the priest's toe, the circle itself is a symbol of harmony and unity, and the act of drawing a circle is reminiscent of a god, Tirawa, making the world circular (Hero with a Thousand Faces 41). There is, therefore, the actual physical act in the ritual, its symbolic parallel in nature, and its divine parallel set in pre-history. Further, Campbell argues that "For a culture still nurtured in mythology the landscape, as well as every phase of human existence, is made alive with symbolical suggestion" (43).